



Brief Guide to Principal and Coordinator Partnership

In 2023, The National Center for Community Schools (NCCS) interviewed 30 current and former exceptional community school principals from across the country. This short guide has been developed from themes identified through these interviews. The principals' entrance to leading a community school, begins with addressing the enabling conditions from the [Essentials for Community School Transformation](#) and cultivating the key mindsets principals need to lead community schools. Additionally, we provide a short overview of the roles and responsibilities of principals and coordinators that align with the Strategic Function of Community School Leadership from [Leading with Purpose and Passion](#), a guide for community school coordinators.

“This is an equity strategy. That is how I guide all my conversations, it's about equity.”

Marco Harris, Assistant Superintendent Albuquerque Schools
(former principal Highland High School)

Community School Principal Leadership Mindsets: Excellent community school principals are distinguished by their deep understanding of the community school strategy and the leadership mindsets that shape their approach. These mindsets are composed of three interlocking aspects: adaptive leadership, equity literacy, and a whole-child approach.

- **Adaptive leadership:** A leadership approach that enables individuals and organizations to navigate complex, uncertain, and evolving challenges by fostering learning, experimentation, collaboration, and the capacity to adapt collectively.

- **Equity Literacy:** Leaders understand the assets and inequities in their community and have the skills and interpersonal relationships to address them. A community school principal is an organizer who starts by uncovering individual strengths and intentionally leveraging those assets to build collective capacity.
- **Whole Child Approach:** An approach to education that recognizes the connection between children's social, emotional, cognitive and academic development, as well as their physical and mental health.

Cultivating these mindsets requires intentional self-reflection and continuous input from the community. We strongly encourage technical assistance providers and initiative leaders to develop ongoing partnerships with principals and their communities to embrace and refine these three essential aspects of community school leadership.

Enabling Conditions begin with the principal: The principal's role is to build systems to support these conditions with all school community's interest holders.

*Collaboratively set a **shared vision:*** Engage community school interest holders in developing a shared vision that reflects collective values, priorities, and aspirations for the future.

*Model effective use of **actionable data:*** Provide school teams with accessible, timely, and relevant data across sources to inform decision-making and deepen understanding of student and community assets and needs.

*Create systems for **inclusive decision-making:*** Examine how decisions are made and who contributes to them, expand opportunities for those closest to the work to inform and lead decisions, and clearly define roles and responsibilities across school teams.

*Strengthen **trusting relationships and systems:*** Support open, authentic conversations with interest holders while assessing and shaping the broader institutional and social conditions that enable trust to flourish.

“You must see your coordinator as your partner, if you cannot see them like they're a leader in your school, things are not going to change.”

Elise Jones, Easton Area Middle School, Easton, PA

Building a Successful Partnership: Principals shared in interviews that effective partnerships with coordinators were built through intentionally designed systems and clear roles. Although the work required substantial time and early investment, particularly in developing both formal and informal relationships, these efforts ultimately led to an enduring alliance with the coordinator and positive school transformation.

- **Meet Weekly:** Regularly scheduled weekly meetings between the principal and coordinator, provide a space to align goals, discuss progress, and address challenges. Informal, ongoing communication throughout the week further strengthens this partnership. The principal and coordinator should reflect on their partnership regularly, using forms such as the [principal and coordinator collaboration tool](#).
- **Invite the CSC to All Committees:** The CSC should be a member of key committees, such as attendance, climate, and instruction. Their inclusion ensures that their expertise and knowledge of partnerships and community inform school operations and decisions and support the integration of the role and strategy within the school.
- **Position Coordinator as a Leader:** The principal should consistently reinforce that the CSC is a leader within the school. They should be a member of the leadership cabinet and other key governance structures. This not only legitimizes their role but also sets the tone for collaborative leadership across the staff and community.
- **Get on the Balcony & Gain the Birds Eye View:** Providing the CSC with access to school-wide data and inviting participation in key teams enables them to understand the broader context and prioritize resources effectively. The coordinator and CSLT engage in collaborative analysis addressing adaptive challenges through innovation and cycles of continuous improvement.

I'm the captain of the ship but this is not my ship, this is our ship, this ship belongs to this community, and making sure people realize that I'm not here to tell you what to do, I'm here to guide us to establish the next steps, so that our students and our families in our community move forward, and that's a bit of different mindset.

Bethany Groves, Webster Elementary, St Augustine FL

Community School Strategic Functions: This is a brief overview of how the principal and coordinator collaborate to lead the strategy together.

Principal	Coordinator
Leadership and Capacity - Lead a shared vision , mobilize people and partnerships, center community voice, and build the systems and skills needed to implement and sustain community school practices.	
Direct instructional leadership	Support identification of partners for connected pedagogy
Participate in community school leadership team (CSLT)	Facilitate community school leadership team (CSLT)
Lead visioning process	Support visioning
Clarify decision making structures	Promote opportunities for community voice
Manage, hire, and train staff	Identify or lead training opportunities on key practices
Data-Informed, People-Driven Decision Making - Using actionable data to guide school improvement, assess strengths and needs, align support, and inform coordinated action by school and community teams.	
Guide school improvement processes	Support and integrate school improvement processes
Ensure Coordinator has access to necessary data systems	Lead team conducting assets and needs assessment
Advocacy and Policy Change - Coordinating across school, district, initiative and partner organizations to develop, align, and advocate for policies, procedures, and systems that support the community school strategy and address inequities	

Liaise with the district and CS initiative leaders	Advocate externally for policies that support the community school model and address systemic inequities.
Establish and reinforce school policies and procedures	Assist policy development and articulation
Communications - Creating clear, coordinated communication systems to share the school's vision, values, and priorities with all partners and ensure alignment.	
Develop clear communication systems	Streamline communication process with all partners and interest holders
Articulate pedagogical vision and values	Ensure alignment with out of school program and day school
Resource Development and Coordination - Identifying assets and needs, aligning partners, and securing resources to strengthen whole student and school success.	
Oversee allocation of individualized supports through MTSS (Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports)	Participate in MTSS and identify partners for emerging needs
Support grant writing and fundraising	Support grant writing and fundraising
Community Engagement and Coordination - Building relationships and aligning partners and families to strengthen school and community connection.	
Support vision alignment with partners	Identify and manage community partnerships
Build relationships with families and attend events	Support family engagement team with events and processes

A note about this guidance: This guidance has been built on resources and lived experience of practitioners. However, the best community school principals regularly:

- receive **feedback** from their colleagues and community.
- **reflect** on their leadership with their coordinator utilizing a process such as the one outlined in this principal-coordinator [collaboration tool](#).
- **share power** to their community school leadership team, youth leadership group, family leaders, and other teams within their school.

Resources that have informed our work:

[Equity Literacy Institute](#) - Works to develop individual and institutional capacity for transformative equity.

[Adaptive Leadership](#) - Short video on adaptive leadership from the author, Ronald Heifitz.

[ABCD Institute](#) - A nonprofit that works with communities to focus on assets, their site has many tools and resources to support mapping and an asset-based mindset.

[Whole Child Toolkit](#) - Resource for policymakers and school leaders to enact support for a whole child approach to schooling.

[The Basics- Role of a Principal](#) - Overview of the principal role in California Community Schools developed by the Community School Learning Exchange.

[Community Schools Practice Guide Series I Guide 1 Collaborative Leadership](#) - This practice guide, developed by the American Institutes for Research, focuses on collaborative leadership in action.